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RENAISSANCE USES OF A MEDIEVAL SENECA: MURDER, STOICISM, AND GENDER IN THE MARGINALIA OF GLASGOW HUNTER 297

Theo van Heijnsbergen

This paper analyzes a Renaissance Scottish reader's inscriptions and annotations in a medieval French manuscript of Seneca's tragedies and discusses what those annotations tell us about early seventeenth-century Scottish literary culture, especially about the culture of northern Scotland. In responding both to Seneca's texts and to the turbulence of the early seventeenth century, these marginalia reveal a coherent set of values related to Renaissance Stoic thought, expressed not through explicit philosophical discourse but through combining selected commonplaces with quotations from a near-contemporary poem by Thomas Overbury that describes the ideal wife and that was already famous for its association with a deadly court scandal. The Scottish owner of the manuscript who inserted these marginalia was himself a murderer who had faced execution, and time and again the life events of his family resemble the plots of Senecan tragedy. The commonplaces he chose resonate also with contemporary Scottish use of moral emblems. These marginalia thus present a rare opportunity to study an early Scottish reader's engagement with a literary manuscript, and they suggest a number of avenues for future scholarly inquiry.

Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 297

GUL MS Hunter 297 (henceforth "Hunter 297"), dating from c.1400, measuring 21x14 cm and bound in an eighteenth-century millboard binding, was bequeathed to the University of Glasgow by William Hunter (1718-83), the well-known physician, anatomist and book collector. After his death, Hunter's library stayed in London for the use of his physician nephew, Matthew Baillie (1761-1823), brother of Joanna

Baillie, the poet (1762-1851), and it was finally sent to Glasgow in 1807. A short French lyric at the very end of the manuscript suggests it originated in a French-speaking area. Its opening folio is delicately floreated, and gilt illuminated initials open the tragedies this manuscript ascribes to Seneca, all written in a regular hand: in order of appearance, *Hercules furens*, *Thyestes*, *Phoenissae* (a.k.a. *Thebais*), *Hippolytus* (a.k.a. *Phaedra*), *Oedipus*, *Troades*, *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, *Octavia*, and *Hercules oetaeus*. Other features indicate that this manuscript was indeed meant for (repeated) reading: the single text colon is margined and ruled, there are running headers with the respective tragedy's number, and the *dramatis personae* are rubricated. The relationship on a typical manuscript page between the original Seneca and the later marginalia is illustrated in Fig. 1. Unfortunately, vandalism confirms the manuscript's attractiveness: several initials, or even entire margins for their initials, have been cut out.

Seneca in late-medieval and early modern Scotland

A central role in the Scottish reception of Stoicism and of one of its key figures, Seneca, was played by the neo-Latin poet George Buchanan. Buchanan's more classical treatment of character replaced that of medieval drama, most crucially when applied to biblical narrative, as in his *Jephthes*, a play that, David Allan argues, "clearly anticipates the full-blown Senecanism in Scottish and European literature more properly associated with the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century."¹ Seneca's stark juxtapositions of anger with desire, or moral blindness with a quest for self-knowledge, had a special appeal for early modern readers, living in an era that seemed without moral compass, where, in the words of a contemporary historian and book-collector, Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun, "integritie lyeth speechless, and upright dealing is readie to give up the ghost."²

¹ David Allan, *Philosophy and Politics in Later Stuart Scotland: Neo-Stoicism, Culture and Ideology in an Age of Crisis, 1540-1690* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2000), 61. On Senecanism, in addition to the studies in fn. 3 below, cf. T.S. Eliot, "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," *Selected Essays*, third edition (London: Faber, 1962), 65-105; Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985); Rosenmeyer, as in n. 28 below; and A.J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1997).

² Quoted in James T. Calder, *Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness, from the tenth century*, second edition (Wick: W. Rae, 1887), 135.

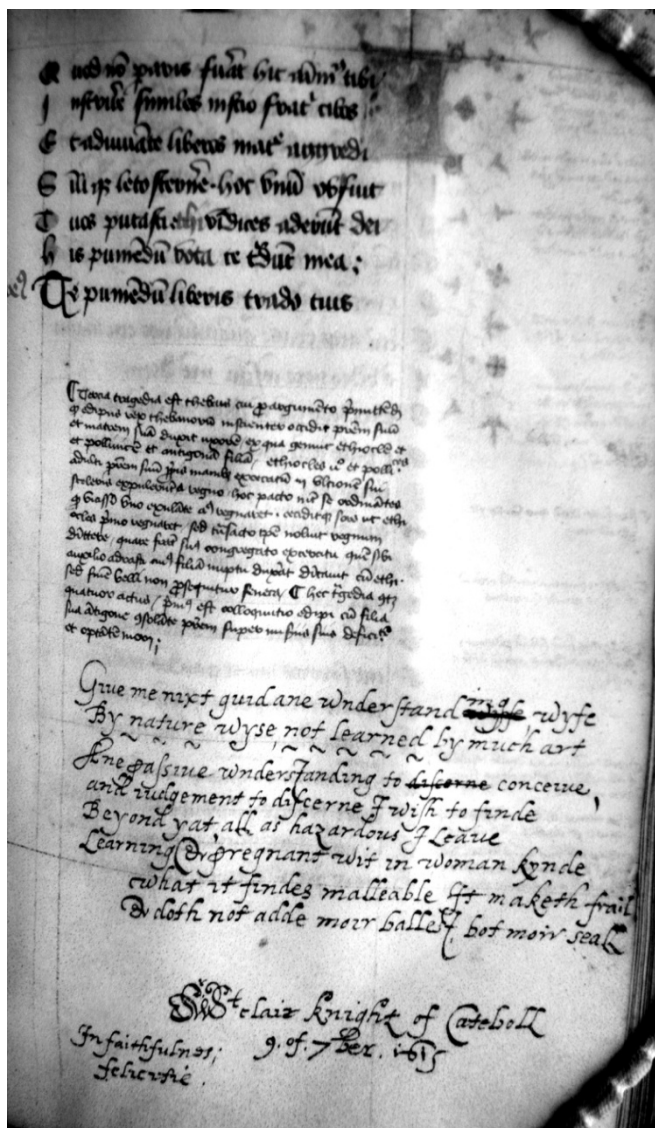


Fig. 1: G.U.L. MS Hunter 297, f. 54r.

Stoicism insisted that, in a cultural situation that seemed without precedent, it was imperative for the individual to seek to impose reason, self-restraint and virtue. The tension between such abstract imperatives and vice and passion running unchecked was keenly felt. That classical texts played a major role in attempts to come to terms with this tension, from the rules of governance in the public sphere of Cicero's *De officiis* to classical didacticism in Elizabethan drama, has long been recognized, and recent scholarship has drawn wider connections between Seneca and the culture of his Elizabethan readers and followers.³

The copy of *Senecae tragædiae* in the Scottish royal library was a gift from George Buchanan himself.⁴ As tutor to Mary Queen of Scots and then James VI, he would have known the extraordinary pressures to which his pupils had to respond and arguably offered Senecan texts as means of developing answers to these challenges. Sir Peter Young, royal librarian and Buchanan's co-tutor, owned a copy of Seneca's *Opera philosophica* (Venice, 1492); the royal library also had a copy of *Thyestes*.⁵ The Regent Moray, Mary's half-brother and political leader of the Protestants at court until his murder in 1570, owned a copy of Seneca's *Opera* edited by Erasmus (a copy stamped in gold with the royal arms), as did James Beaton, Archbishop of Glasgow, a loyal Marian and after 1571 the senior Catholic Scottish cleric, and Robert Danielston, rector of Dysart, whose book ownership and connections to the famous Bannatyne Manuscript are documented elsewhere.⁶

³ On contemporary Stoicism and Senecan influence, studies include Gilles D. Monsarrat, *Light from the Porch: Stoicism and English Renaissance Literature* (Paris: Didier-Érudition, 1984); Andrew Shifflett, *Stoicism, Politics, and Literature in the Age of Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), esp. pp. 3-6; and Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012), esp. pp. xii-xv.

⁴ George F. Warner, ed., "The Library of James VI 1573-83," *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society* 1 (1893): xi-lxxv and 586-95 (p. lxix).

⁵ John Higgitt, ed., *Scottish Libraries* (London: British Library, 2006), 314; Warner, 38.

⁶ Higgitt, 310, and see also 469; John Durkan and Anthony Ross, eds., *Early Scottish Libraries* (Glasgow: J.S. Burns, 1961), 25, 88, 147. On Danielston, see Theo van Heijnsbergen, "Studies in the Contextualisation of Mid-Sixteenth-Century Scottish Verse," unpublished PhD thesis (University of Glasgow, 2010), 45-6, 148-9.

Seneca also has a presence at the Scottish court as an influence on contemporary writing. The poet and courtier-politician William Alexander, first earl of Stirling and trusted servant of James VI, took Sidney's cue that in drama Seneca represents the height of a dramatic style and morality and thus obtains "the very end of poesy."⁷ Alexander produced no less than four Senecan tragedies, though like most Seneca-based contemporary drama they were probably meant to be read rather than performed. If at times they seem excessively aphoristic, Alexander's tragedies nevertheless continue to pit self-sufficient virtue against the insidious pressures of fate, and in dramatising the fall of Princes, the plays follow on from the late-medieval literary genre of Advice to Princes.

Alexander's good friend and regular correspondent, William Drummond of Hawthornden, owned a heavily annotated copy of Alexander's *Monarchicke Tragedies* (1607) as well as a copy of its 1616 edition. His library shows a broad interest in Seneca. He owned three of Seneca's works, including one of the tragedies, *Medea*, bought in France in 1607, a year in which he also read a French translation of Seneca, one of many indications that, as is confirmed by Hunter 297, Scottish readers leaned towards French rather than Italian receptions of Senecan drama.⁸

John Lyon, eighth Lord Glamis, gifted the courtly advice manual and Renaissance bestseller *Il Cortegiano* to James VI, but also "*Flores Senecae* 16^o" and "*Senecae opera*, fol^o." Glamis had been in attendance on the young king in the 1570s, and clearly belonged to an inner circle at court. He was appreciated by all as "very wise and discreet." This wisdom may have derived from a tumultuous family history not unworthy of a Senecan plot: probably as a result of family rivalries, in 1537 his father, John Lyon, seventh Lord Glamis, and the latter's mother, Janet Douglas, sister of the sixth earl of Angus, were accused of attempting to poison James V. Janet Douglas was publicly executed; John was condemned to death but spared, as a minor. The eighth Lord Glamis also met a violent death, shot through the head in a scuffle in Stirling in 1578. His brother, Thomas Lyon of Auldbar, was also in attendance on James and one of those effectively keeping the young monarch hostage

⁷ G. Gregory Smith, ed., *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), I:197.

⁸ Robert H. MacDonald, *The Library of Drummond of Hawthornden* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1971), 139, 159, 181, 187, 221. See also Allan, 24-5, for more examples of contemporary Scots owning Senecan books.

during the Ruthven Raid (1582-83). In contrast, his son, John Lyon of Auldbar, like the eighth earl of Glamis, seems to have been of a more Stoic disposition: he commemorated in verse the death of the Chancellor, Alexander Seton, Scotland's "very embodiment of the Stoical virtues."⁹

Life in Scotland thus exhibited real-life events that made Senecan plots of interest to contemporary readers, as well as the books and manuscripts to meet such demand. In Renaissance Scotland, manuscript still rivalled print as a means of circulating texts; the General Assembly in 1563 stipulated that works "published in wryte" (i.e. in manuscript) as well as those "sett forth in print" had to be approved by its learned censors. Such scribal publishing, often for a known textual community, provided the context for the Bannatyne MS, copied out later in that decade with a clear expectation of being read "in wryte." Moreover, by adding "et amicorum" to ownership inscriptions, as instanced below, Scottish bookowners frequently stressed that a text was effectively "co-owned." Individual book ownership often instanced shared rather than private use, and a dissemination of texts well beyond a single reader, and the book-ownership details above therefore suggest a not inconsiderable readership for Senecan texts in Scotland c.1600.

Seneca, book circulation and the Sinclairs

One further example of book circulation emanating from court circles leads more directly to Hunter 297. George Sinclair, second laird of Mey, gifted books (two volumes of Terence) to the royal library, as did his father, the fourth earl of Caithness. Sinclair was appointed Chancellor of Caithness by Robert Stewart, bishop of Caithness, a man with a sizeable library who was close to these Sinclairs. Stewart himself donated many books to the royal library, including the *Institutes of Calvin*, and was instrumental in returning to that library books once borrowed from Mary.¹⁰ The link between Stoicism and Calvinism is shown in Calvin's first complete published work, which was an edition of Seneca's *De clementia*, a treatise of advice for monarchs, a genre central to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Scottish writing and theories of kingship.¹¹

⁹ See their respective entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (henceforth *ODNB*). Allan, 109, 116; Warner, xlix, lii, lxiv.

¹⁰ Durkan and Ross, 63-4; Warner, xl, xliii, lii, lix, lx; *The Scots Peerage*, ed. Sir J. Balfour Paul, 9 vols. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1904-14), II:339.

¹¹ Peter Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 312-13.

It is this George Sinclair's son and heir, William Sinclair, third of Mey, whose name and inscriptions occur in many places in Hunter 297, suggesting he took more than a passing interest in it. This focus on books runs in the wider family: the Sinclairs of Caithness were one of three key branches descended from William Sinclair, third earl of Orkney, the other two being the Sinclairs of Sinclair and of Roslin. These branches all had prominent literary connections. Gavin Douglas dedicated *Eneados*, his seminal translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1513), to his kinsman, Henry, third Lord Sinclair (d.1513), grandson of the third earl of Orkney. Henry was a book collector, "fader of bukis, protectour to sciens and lair."¹² Most crucially, his library contained one of Scotland's key early manuscripts, Bodleian MS Arch. Selden B.24, a collection that includes the only extant copy of *The Kingis Quair* as well as Scots versions of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Parlement of Foules*. Likewise, several descendants of Sir Oliver Sinclair of Roslin (d.1523), son of the above-mentioned earl of Orkney, must be mentioned here. His grandson and heir (1554) to the Roslin estate, Sir William Sinclair of Roslin, collected Classical and Italian Renaissance texts as well as Scottish historical chronicles. Oliver's own son, John Sinclair (d.1566), the Dean of Restalrig who married Mary Queen of Scots to Darnley, had an even larger library, ranging from Ovid and Lucan via the church fathers to Erasmus and Guillaume Budé; he also had a loan of "bukis of Chawser and Gower." Finally, well over a hundred books are recorded as having belonged to another son of Oliver, namely Henry Sinclair, royal secretary, Dean of Glasgow and then Bishop of Ross (d.1565). It is indubitably his "singularly uniform" signature that can be found on f.261r of Hunter 297.¹³

¹² Gavin Douglas, *Virgil's Aeneid*, ed. David F.C. Coldwell, 4 vols, (Scottish Text Society, 1957-64), II:5.

¹³ Durkan and Ross, 49-63, 143-4, 171-2, and additions to Durkan and Ross in *Bibliothek* 10 (1980-81): 90-2, *Bibliothek* 11 (1982-83): 31, *Bibliothek* 12 (1984-85): 85, 89; T.A.F. Cherry, "The Library of Henry Sinclair, Bishop of Ross, 1560-1565," in *Bibliothek* 4 (1963-66): 13-24; H.J. Lawlor, "Notes on the Library of the Sinclairs of Rosslyn," *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 32 (1897-98): 90-120; Richard Augustine Hay, *Genealogie of the Sainteclaires of Rosslyn* (Edinburgh, 1835), 136; *Registrum Monasterii S. Marie de Cambuskenneth*, ed. Sir William Fraser (Edinburgh, 1872), xxxii. For Henry's signature, compare Fig. 2 to Durkan and Ross, Plates XXXII and XXXVIII, and to Lawlor, 94.

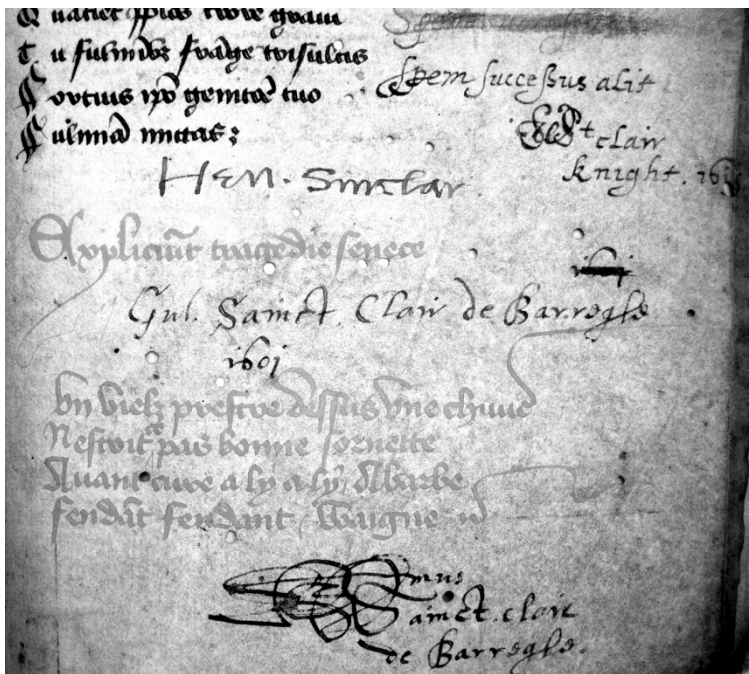


Fig. 2: from G.U.L. MS Hunter 297, f. 261r.

Henry's brother, Oliver Sinclair younger, married Katherine Bellenden, whose eldest brother, Mr Thomas Bellenden of Auchnoull, lawyer and key civil servant under James V, had a hand in copying out an *Eneados* MS and is our source of information for what was probably a performance of what later became David Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. Katherine succeeded Janet Douglas, wife of the poet and dramatist David Lyndsay, as royal seamstress, while Thomas's brother, John Bellenden, was after Lyndsay the foremost author under James V. Moreover, the Bellendens functioned as a cultural patron to the Bannatynes, a younger branch of the same Ballantyne family, and Bellenden's verse occupies key positions in the Bannatyne MS.¹⁴ Again,

¹⁴ Theo van Heijnsbergen, "The Interaction between Literature and History in Queen Mary's Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Manuscript and its Prosopographical

literature and books travel in families: Katherine Bellenden's son from a previous marriage was Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney, whose library is of national importance and includes a copy of Seneca's tragedies.¹⁵

Apart from Hunter 297, William Sinclair, third of Mey, also owned *Liber Genesis Santis Pagnini interprete*, previously owned by 'Hen. Sinclar', like Hunter 297, and by – all the same person – "Guil. Sinclar junior de mey," "Gulielmus Sinclar de mey anno domini 1602" and "Guil. Sinclar et amicorum," with other signatures from the same period. "Amicorum" may also have included John Robertson or Robeson, Treasurer of neighbouring Ross until 1596: he owned Pagnini's *Biblia* and the copy of Seneca's *Opera* previously owned by the Robert Danielston mentioned above, grandson of Mr Thomas Bellenden, whose ownership inscriptions also frequently add "et amicorum."¹⁶

That Henry Sinclair's signature occurs in both books later owned by William Sinclair of Mey suggests familial patterns of book-circulation. The Roslin library was passed down the generations. Many of Henry's books and manuscripts were passed on to his brother's son, Sir William (d.1582), then to the latter's son, another Sir William (d.1628). It was then that the Sinclairs of Mey most likely obtained items from the Roslin library; much of it was dispersed in the decades after 1612, when the family experienced financial problems. The then Lord Sinclair, a "leud man" who "kept a miller's daughter," was not only a Catholic but also the hereditary grandmaster of the Scottish Freemasons; "vexd" by the Presbyterians, he left for Ireland.¹⁷

These details suggest that book circulation and collective ownership were important complements to book buying within this lively and learned set of cultural agents connecting court, church and landed gentry. In this pattern, the presence of Senecan texts helps remove any preconceptions that pre-Union Scotland had little or no humanist or Renaissance literary culture; details above suggest such culture extended

Context," in *The Renaissance in Scotland*, ed. A.A. MacDonald *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 183-225 (pp. 190-8).

¹⁵ Duncan Shaw, "Adam Bothwell: A Conserver of the Renaissance in Scotland," in *Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland*, ed. Ian B. Cowan (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983), 141-69; *The Warrender Papers*, ed. Annie I. Cameron, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1931-32), 2:396-413 and 461-5 (p. 406).

¹⁶ Cherry, 22; Durkan and Ross, 88, 138-9.

¹⁷ Lawlor; Hay, 154.

to Scotland's northern-most mainland. The castle of Mey stands only six miles west of John o'Groats. It was for a long time referred to as the castle of Barrogill (or Barregle, the name used in Hunter 297), but when the Queen Mother selected it in the early 1950s as her preferred residence in Scotland, she restored its original name.¹⁸ The castle and its inhabitants exercised a cultural pull c.1600, too. When William Lithgow, the well-known Scottish travel-writer, journeyed north in 1628, he stayed with William Sinclair of Mey, owner of Hunter 297. Lithgow eulogised the castle and its inhabitants in a poem considered sufficiently important to be included in the many editions of his travel books.¹⁹

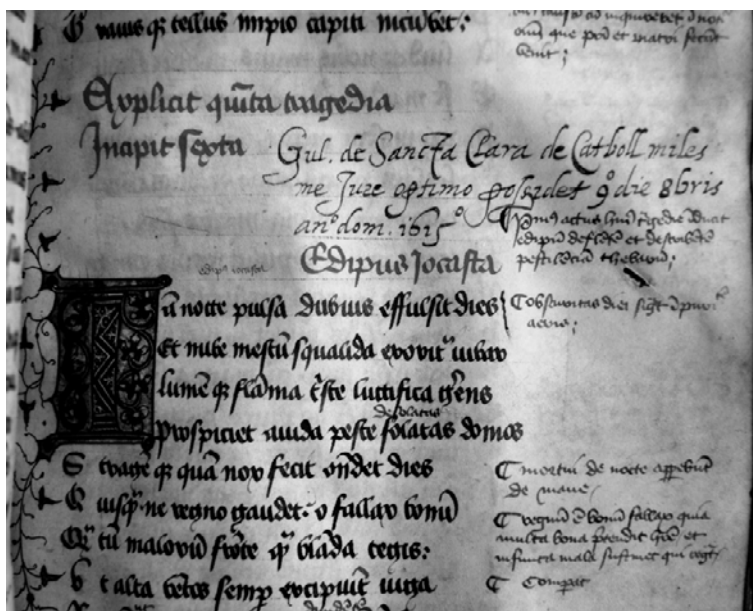


Fig. 3: from G.U.L. MS Hunter 297, f. 97r.

¹⁸ Historic Scotland, <http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pls/html/db/f?p=2200:15:0:::BUILDING:1797>.

¹⁹ William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse, of the rare adventures, and painefull peregrinations of long nineteene yeares traauayles from SCOTLAND, ...* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1632), 501-504.

The inscriptions

Scattered through Hunter 297 are repeated ownership inscriptions, signatures, and dates, sometimes with more than one on a page, as tabulated below. Because the manuscript has been provided with folio numbers only on the first folio of each quire, leaving the folios in between unnumbered, the list gives first a reference to the foliation, and then (in parentheses) a two-part reference to the same leaf by quire-number and by folio within the quire. An asterisk identifies the pages where the signatures are accompanied by the longer contemporary marginal insertions that I transcribe and discuss more fully in a subsequent section.

2r (1:2r)	G ^{mus} Sanct.clair de Barregle
3r (1:3r)	gul. Saint Clair de Barregle
9r (2:1r) *	SWS. knight
14r (2:6r)	SW S ^t clair knight of Cateboll prid. idus 8 ^{bris} [<i>October</i>] an ^o . dom 1615
30r (4:6r) *	SWS ^t clair knight. 3 ea idus 7 ^{bris} [<i>September</i>] an. 1615
38r (5:6r)	G ^{mus} St. clair de Barregle 1601
54r (6:6r) *	S ^t WS ^t clair knight of Cateboll 9.of.7ber [<i>September</i>] 1615
69r (9:5r) *	SWS ^t clair.
97r (13:1r)	Gul. de Sancta Clara de Catboll miles me Iure optimo possidet 9 ^o die 8bris [<i>October</i>] an ^o dom. 1615 ^o
136v (17:8v) *	Gulielmus Sanct. clair de Barregle me possidet 1601
153r (20:1r)	S ^t WS ^t clair knight.
172r (22:4r)	SWS. knight of Catboll [<i>not noted in GUL catalogue</i>]
173r (22:5r) *	Gul. de S ^{cta} Clara, miles
196v (25:4v) *	Gul. de S ^{cta} Clara de Catboll miles SWS
218v (28:2v) *	SWS knight
261r (33:5r) *	Hen. Sinclair; SWS ^t clair knight 1615; Gul. Saint Clair de Barregle 1601; G ^{mus} Sainct.clair de Barregle
261v (33:5v)	Gulielmus Saint clair de barregle me Iure possidet

Seventeen folios thus have at least one signature. Henry Sinclair also put multiple signatures in his books and manuscripts, perhaps to make his ownership difficult to disprove, and in Hunter 297 signatures are sometimes followed by the phrase “me (Iure) possidet.”²⁰ But here the multiple signatures may have an added purpose: all verses and mottoes entered as marginalia in Hunter 297 (as distinct from the many interlinear

²⁰ Durkan and Ross, 9-10.

and marginal Latin glosses and comments on the Senecan texts added at a much earlier date) are accompanied by a signature, as if to highlight their authority or relevance. The uniform, delicate handwriting of both signatures and marginalia reinforces such an authorising intention. This, in its turn, suggests the marginalia were quite carefully chosen, and that the signatures identify the scribe.

Attempts to link these marginalia to the Senecan tragedies they are juxtaposed with offer only speculative connections. Thus, reading *Medea* may well have triggered the lines of verse in its margin (f.153r, discussed below) on love *versus* lust, but their moralising is too generic to draw specific conclusions about their relationship to Seneca's text. The discussion below instead investigates how the marginalia collectively tell a story of their own that is more than the sum of its parts.

The scribe

Leaving aside the single instance of "Hen. Sinclar" (f.261r), the nineteen signatures in Hunter 297 all refer to one man: Sir William Sinclair of Mey, later of Barrogill and then Cateboll.²¹ Book ownership was not his family's only tradition: physical violence and conflict also take centre stage in their pedigree in ways that suggest Seneca's vengeful plots, incestuous murders and irate characters would hold a particular interest for them. The family chief, George Sinclair, fourth earl of Caithness, was justiciar of Caithness even though he was renowned for brutality. An opportunist Catholic and Marian, he had been the foreman of the jury at the sham trial that acquitted the earl of Bothwell of murdering Darnley, Mary Queen of Scots' husband; Bothwell subsequently married Mary, in an extraordinary sequence of events which reputedly included raping the Queen. This George Sinclair also poisoned his bitter enemy, the earl of Sutherland and his wife, and then forced the murdered earl's fifteen-year-old son (Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun, the historian mentioned above) into marriage with his daughter, a thirty-two-year old of dubious moral reputation. Most startlingly, Sinclair imprisoned his own son and heir, John, in his castle of Girnigoe, some 23 kilometers south of John o'Groats, for plotting against him. While in prison John managed in 1572/73 to kill his younger brother William, first of Mey, with his

²¹ *Scots Peerage*, II:351-2; John Henderson, *Caithness Family History* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1884), 61.

chains.²² This William's wife, Jane or Janet Hepburn, had previously been married to Patrick, third earl of Bothwell, and their son, Francis Stewart, earl of Bothwell, was another volatile and violent figure, whose actions included murder and besieging his own king in Falkland Palace. George Sinclair, fourth earl, was also patron of the poet, double agent and later royal secretary William Fowler, with whom he travelled on the continent and who himself travelled north and dedicated a sonnet in 1598 to the earl of Caithness.²³

The imprisoned son John Sinclair died on 15 March 1577, after seven years of starvation and neglect in prison – but got his posthumous revenge in the best family tradition. John's own son, another George Sinclair ("Wicked George"), later fifth earl of Caithness (succeeded 1582/3), at some time before 19 May 1585 killed his father's former jailers, Ingram and David Sinclair, "shooting the former in the head and killing the latter with his sword."²⁴

Upon the murder of William Sinclair, first of Mey, his younger brother, yet another George, had received the estate, and it is the latter's eldest son, yet another William, third of Mey (born c.1582, died c.1643), whose signatures and marginalia appear in Hunter 297. Considering the family environment of fratricide, infanticide and, possibly, intended patricide, it is perhaps no surprise that the first memorable event recorded about this William Sinclair, when he was still a schoolboy, is his murder in September 1595 of an Edinburgh town councillor. Upon being denied their holidays, Edinburgh grammar school pupils had barricaded themselves in the school building. When bailie John Macmorran tried to force his way in, William Sinclair shot him in the head at point blank range. As the editor of the Privy Council minutes notes, "few incidents in the history of Edinburgh have left a stronger mark in the local memory." Nevertheless, the influence of "landed gentlemen" secured the young man a pardon, much against the wishes of locals.²⁵

²² "George Sinclair, fourth earl of Caithness" in *ODNB*; Calder, 119-22; Henderson, 67.

²³ In addition to *ODNB* entries for those mentioned here, see *Works of William Fowler*, ed. Henry W. Meikle *et al.*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1914-40), I:256.

²⁴ *Scots Peerage*, II:340, 342; Calder, 122, 127-8; "George Sinclair, fifth earl of Caithness," in *ODNB*.

²⁵ Henderson 61-2; *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, ed. J.H.Burton *et al.*, 14 vols (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1877-98), V: xl, 236-8.

In 1600 William Sinclair married Katherine, daughter of George Ross of Balnagowan.²⁶ Katherine's wifely influence on William was perhaps limited: not only did she die in July 1603, but both her father (Alexander, ninth of Balnagowan) and her eldest brother, George, tenth of Balnagowan, were notoriously ungovernable, even though George was the first Clan Ross chief to go to university. Alexander was outlawed in 1585 "for his crimes and plundering" and denounced by the Privy Council for helping the fugitive earl of Bothwell in 1592; George died an outlaw in 1615, "having bankrupted the estate."²⁷ Nevertheless, William Sinclair of Mey did eventually enter more tranquil waters, inheriting his father's estate in 1616 and being knighted. And Katherine Ross did leave a mark on Hunter 297: the phrase "*Spem successus alit*" ("Success nourishes hope"), written twice in William Sinclair's own hand on its last folio, is the Ross family motto. This last folio is full of family: asserting ownership, it has four signatures by William himself, with different dates and titles, as well as Henry Sinclair's signature, thus inscribing a long-standing family interest in this Senecan manuscript. Sinclair's addition of his wife's family motto in that prominent location articulates, through bookownership, the cultural-political aspirations of such families and, conceivably, a wife's role within them.

The Ross motto also instances the meaningful interaction within Sinclair's marginalia between content and form. Formally, Sinclair's inscriptions generally have a motto-like quality, serving as memory-places by which he indexes his own (and perhaps his reader's) mind, as in commonplace books. In terms of content, they foreground a key Senecan ideal: passion (whether physical desire, or emotion more generally) must submit to reason. In particular, the vernacular inscriptions emphasize the role of (desire for) the female in relation to virtue, a correlation echoed by Sinclair's own motto: *virtute et amore* (discussed further below). The female becomes a site in which such issues can be isolated, discursively performed and – at least conceptually – resolved in ways that regulate real-life public and domestic relations, as well as more abstract ones.

²⁶ *Scots Peerage*, II:352; Sinclair of Mey genealogy at <http://www.stirnet.com/>.

²⁷ Historic Scotland, <http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pls/html/db/f?p=2400:15:0::::GARDEN:GDL00046#history>.

Seneca, Sinclair, and the Overbury scandal

Discussing such gendered use of this marginal space introduces one further preliminary consideration. It has not hitherto been noted that all of Sinclair's vernacular inscriptions (except extract 4 and the short motto at the end of extract 3) are from a single source, Thomas Overbury's poem *A Wife*, first printed in 1614, but written earlier. The identification of Overbury as source provides a crucial interpretative angle on Sinclair's annotations as a whole.

Like William Sinclair, Thomas Overbury (c.1581-1613) had his own reasons to reflect on the kind of passion and lack of self-control dramatised in Senecan tragedy. The son of an English MP, he went "upon a voyage of pleasure" to Scotland c.1601, where he made many contacts through Sir William Cornwallis. In the same year, Cornwallis published *Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian* in London, which Thomas Rosenmeyer calls the "first full-size English commentary on Senecan drama."²⁸ Cornwallis was a friend of John Donne, another author whose presence in early seventeenth-century Scotland is now coming into focus.²⁹ Cornwallis came to be known as an essayist whose quality of writing was only equalled by Francis Bacon, and he introduced Montaigne to a wider British readership. His Stoic ethics were strongly influenced by Seneca, and his presence in Scotland in the very year of the publication of his book on Seneca calls for further inquiry, to which Sinclair's use of Hunter 297 may also contribute.

Cornwallis introduced Overbury to the young Robert Kerr, later earl of Somerset, James VI's favourite from 1607 onwards. Overbury became Kerr's personal assistant and counsellor. Having composed amatory letters on Kerr's behalf to Frances Howard, the earl of Essex's wife, Overbury subsequently became caught up in the power games surrounding this liaison; he displeased even the King, and was eventually incarcerated in the Tower. There he suffered a fate remarkably like John Sinclair's in Girnigoe Castle. Not allowed any contact with the outside world, abandoned even by his friends, Overbury was poisoned, almost certainly on Frances Howard's behalf. Medical complications led to his

²⁸ Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), 29. Details on Overbury are from *ODNB*.

²⁹ Priscilla Bawcutt, "John Donne: The Scottish Connection," in *James VI and I, Literature and Scotland; Tides of Change, 1567-1625*, ed. David Parkinson (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 323-40.

excruciating death in September 1613. Overbury's manuscript poem *A Wife* was printed just months later. Over the next few years, it was frequently reprinted, and ever more verses added to its original 47 stanzas, together with prose "Characters, or Wittie descriptions of the properties of sundry Persons" that schematically juxtaposed vices and virtues. The precedent for this format was *Characters of Virtues and Vices* (1608) by bishop Joseph Hall, dubbed "the English Seneca" because of his adoption of neo-Stoic beliefs and a Senecan prose style, but the Overbury affair made this format particularly popular.³⁰ Several of those implicated in this "scandal of the decade" were executed; Kerr and Howard were spared execution but were imprisoned and disgraced. And, ironically given the author's experience with Frances Howard, Overbury's *A Wife* became a bestseller.

William Sinclair's inscriptions in Hunter 297

The account below records Sinclair's inscriptions one by one, in the order they occur in the manuscript, together with their sources in Overbury or elsewhere and a preliminary discussion of their significance.

1: f.9r, at *Hercules furens*, ll. 425-45:

Birth les then Beautie Shall my reasone blind
 hir Birth gois to my cheildring not me
 Rather had I that actiue uerteu find
 In hir self; then flouing from ^{hir} Ancestrie
 ['hir' originally omitted, then inserted]

Sinclair's last two lines differ from their equivalent in the various editions of *A Wife* dating from 1614-15 which, in full, read:

Birth, lesse then *beauty*, shall my *reason* blinde,
 Hir *birth* goes to my *Children*, not to me.
 Rather had I that *actiue gentry* finde,
Vertue, then *passiue* from hir Auncestrie;
 Rather in *her aliue* one vertue see,
 Then all the rest dead in her *Pedigree*. (stanza 19)

This stanza occurs in a section of Overbury's poem that stresses that "beauty" and "gentry" can only be "good" when combined with "vertue." Nevertheless, Overbury's stanza 19 still links "vertue" to birth by

³⁰ ODNB entry on Joseph Hall; Allan, 19 and 38, note 55.

defining it as an instance of “active gentry,” i.e. a quality expressed in terms of class. Sinclair’s version, by changing “gentry” into “virtue” (thus also making space for “in hir self” in the next line) removes any semantic field of aristocracy when linking an individual to virtue. Sinclair does retain “hir Ancestrie,” a term within the semantic field of kin rather than class, unlike Overbury’s “Pedigree,” which conflates the two. Sinclair thus makes virtue a more exclusively ethical quality, attainable by all, and his “in hir self” conspicuously emphasizes the demand on women to perform virtue; her virtue is to be “active” rather than, as in Overbury, “alive.” Moreover, the tighter four-line format makes Sinclair’s excerpt more like an epigram, aligning it more closely to humanist practices of literary compilation.

2: f.30r, at the beginning of *Thyestes*:

Beautie is loues obiect, woman lusts, to gaine
Loue, Loue desyres, | Lust only to obtaine.

The complete stanza 41 in Overbury’s *A Wife* reads:

Loue is a kinde of *Superstition*,
Which feares the Idoll which itselfe hath fram’d,
Lust a Desire, which rather from his *owne*
Temper, then from the *obiect* is enflam’d;
Beauty is Loues *obiect*, *Woman* Lust’s, to gaine
Loue, Loue Desires, *Lust* only to obtaine.

Sinclair’s excerpted couplet implies that beauty is the “obiect” (i.e. focus and aim) of Love, but that of Lust is merely to gain woman, desiring not Love but merely to obtain. The potentially positive force of beauty as catalyst of “*spirituall-harmonie*” (Overbury, stanza 40, l. 5) is deconstructed into its opposite: self-centred desire feeding (on) its own heat or “*Temper*.”

3: f.54r, at the end of *Thyestes*:

Giue me nixt guid ane understand ~~wyfe~~^{ing} wyfe
By nature wyse, not learned by much art
~~~~~  
Ane passiue understanding to ~~discerne~~ conceiue,  
and iudgement to discern I wish to finde  
Beyond Pat all as hazardous I Leauē  
Learning & pregnant wit in woman kynde

what it findes malleable It maketh frail  
 & doth not adde moir ballest, bot moir seall [i.e., “sail”]

In faithfulness: felicitie

There are no differences here from Overbury’s equivalent stanza 30, ll. 1-2, and stanza 31. A wife’s “actiue uertue” (extolled in extract 1 above) is now aligned with “passive understanding,” not “learning and pregnant wit;” women’s virtue is to be neither proactive nor ratiocinative.

The final phrase, “In faithfulness: felicitie” is not in Overbury, but reads like Sinclair’s own motto-like gloss on Overbury: passive rather than actively applied understanding guides woman to faithfulness and thus (mutual, it is implied) felicity, adding sexual self-restraint to the required wifely qualities. Amatory overtones are thus absorbed into a philosophical system: “felicity” is essentially another word for the *eudaimonia* (happiness, or “good-spirit”) that, based on virtue pursued for its own reward, was the benchmark for Stoic life. This blend of spiritual and philosophical qualities, linked to gender and socio-political practice, provides Sinclair’s framework of reference in his inscriptions.

4: f.69r, at the beginning of *Hippolytus* (that is, *Phaedra*):

the bee, the speder by ane diuers pouar  
 Sucke honnie, poison from the self same flouer

This couplet can be found *verbatim* (with “and spider,” not “the speder”), on the title-page of Frances Davison’s *A Poetical Rhapsody* (London, 1602 etc.), a collection of poems, sonnets, pastorals and epigrams. But the image itself is a frequently used one that had come to the attention of a contemporary audience earlier through an emblem by Whitney (Leyden, 1586) that foregrounds the way in which using one and the same object (the flower) can lead to different results depending on the user and his or her intentions – a notion which was expressly applied to the uses of Scripture. Whitney’s emblem in turn had previously been used by Adriaan Junius, a well-known Dutch humanist scholar and physician, tutor to the poet Surrey’s children, in his *Emblemata* (1565), where the Latin commentary attached to this emblem reads (in translation):

The same flower fills the Spider with her poisonous juice, as  
 provides liquid honey for the Bee. The same phrase gives rise to

unity and discord: Scripture that is a dagger in the hands of the wicked becomes a shield to defend the good.<sup>31</sup>

The bee/spider quotation thus constitutes Sinclair's meta-comment signalling his own very conscious use of his sources (be they Seneca, Overbury, or others), and it also introduces his use of the emblem tradition and contemporary visual culture, a facet of the marginalia I discuss further below.

5: f.153r, at *Medea*, ll. 201-22:

The face we may the seat of beautie call  
In it the relish of þe rest doth lye  
Nay, euin ane figure of the mynd with all  
And of the face þe lyfe moues in the Eye  
Beautie is Loues obiect; wemen Lusts, to gaine  
Loue, Loue desyres, Lust only to obtaine.

Here Sinclair again assembles his own text from separate sections of Overbury: the first four lines are from *A Wife*, stanza 39, ll. 1-4, but they are followed by two lines from stanza 41 that Sinclair had already used as a kind of *leitmotif* at the opening of Hunter 297 (f.30r: extract 2, above). The face as the "figure of the mynd" recalls contemporary neo-Platonic imagery such as William Drummond's verse:

My Minde mee told, that in some other Place  
It elsewhere saw the *Idea* of that Face,  
And lou'd a Loue of heavenly pure Delight.<sup>32</sup>

Overbury indeed had concluded stanza 39 with the neo-Platonic image of love as ideal complementarity:

No things else being *two* so like we see,  
So like, that they *two* but in Number be.

Sinclair's substitution for Overbury's conclusion perhaps represents a redaction of Overbury's text that sets the need for the assertion of (male) reason, and its inculcation by women, against the backdrop of the cosmic chaos depicted in Seneca's tragedies.

<sup>31</sup> French Emblems at Glasgow,  
<http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/emblem.php?id=FJUb033>; Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes*, ed. Peter M. Daly and Anthony Raspa, in *The English Emblem Tradition*, 1, ed. Peter Daly *et al.* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1988), 79-337 (141).

<sup>32</sup> *Poetical Works of William Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed. L.E. Kastner, 2 vols. [Scottish Text Society, n.s. 3] (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1913), I:6.

The need to patrol conduct through advocating self-restraint is in the other excerpts lifted to a more gender-neutral level. Sinclair's next inscription reads:

6: f.173r, after l. 61 of *Agamemnon*:

Sincerum est nisi vas quodcunque infundis acescit  
Sperne voluptates; nocet empta dolore voluptas

"Unless the vessel is clean, whatever you pour in turns sour. Scorn pleasures: pleasure bought with pain is harmful": these are lines 54-5 from Horace's *Epistles* I, ii, in a section that urges the reader to "dare to be wise" (*sapere aude*, l. 40). The first line is part of an extended metaphor urging that we should rid ourselves of any contamination to become clean vessels for wisdom and virtue and so achieve happiness. The second line identifies one specific cause of contamination, pleasure that is not filtered by reason and therefore harms such happiness. Calls for self-restraint and moral self-improvement are thus given classical authority, a combination that clearly appealed to Sinclair. Horace in this epistle also enjoined the reading of books as a means towards wisdom, just as Sinclair was using this manuscript: "if you don't call for a book and a light before daybreak, ... envy or passion will keep you awake in torment" (ll. 35, 37).<sup>33</sup>

Sinclair is probably not quoting here directly from an actual edition of Horace, but from Otto van Veen's (or: Vaenius's) influential emblem book, *Quinti Horatii Flacci emblemata*, first published in Antwerp in 1607, in which Horatian *sententiae* were illustrated with engravings and explanatory verses, often in several languages.<sup>34</sup> Vaenius's aim was to celebrate Stoic tenets, and his preface (p. xiv) champions the founding figure of neo-Stoicism, Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), whose work was particularly based on Seneca.<sup>35</sup> Vaenius's book was frequently reprinted as well as revised (already in 1607, again in 1612), and quickly found its

<sup>33</sup> Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, transl. H. Rushton Fairclough [Loeb Classical Library 194] (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927), 264-267 (with *quocumque*, not *quodcunque* as in Hunter 297).

<sup>34</sup> Note also the variant title *Emblemata Horatiana*; Leonard Forster, "Die *Emblemata Horatiana* des Otho Vaenius," in *Geschichte des Textverständnisses am Beispiel von Pindar und Horaz*, ed. Walther Killy (München: Kraus, 1981), 117-28 ("eines der einflussreichsten Bücher des europäischen Barocks," p. 117).

<sup>35</sup> On Lipsius, cf. Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, as in n. 3 above, ch. 1.

way to Britain; Prince Henry (d.1612) had it in his library. It was also the main source for no less than eight panels in the spectacular painted ceiling commissioned in 1613 by Alexander Seton, Chancellor of Scotland, for Pinkie House in Musselburgh, where the young Charles I lived immediately after his father had moved south in 1603. The first line of the Horace couplet that Sinclair quotes is illustrated in Vaenius's book, and Seton used on his ceiling a motto from the line immediately following that couplet ("semper avarus eget": "the miser is ever in want").<sup>36</sup> While Pinkie House provides landmark evidence of neo-Stoic interests among the Scottish elite, Montaigne's study was similarly decorated, and he quoted the first line of Sinclair's couplet in his essay "Of experience," while a close English equivalent was the gallery in the house of Nicholas Bacon (father of Francis Bacon) at Gorhambury; tellingly, the main source for its Latin *sententiae* was Seneca.<sup>37</sup>

This phenomenon, accumulating sententious maxims in textual and visual format as "memory-theatres," often using walls and ceilings as illustrated commonplace-books, was widespread, especially in Stewart Scotland. Its didactic-humanist intentions, commonplace technique and rhetorical nature are part of a poetics of public self-fashioning that complements cultural practice in contemporary plays or court lyrics, the formats to which mono-disciplinary literary criticism still instinctively turns.<sup>38</sup>

Two further points should be noted that underscore the connection between Sinclair's use of *sententiae* and contemporary visual sources. First, Sinclair's delicate calligraphy (illustrated in Fig. 1 above) suggests a delight in shaping letters and the visual pleasure of emblematically presented *sententiae* and mottoes. As Bath notes: "The relationship between epigraphy and emblems in the Renaissance was particularly close."<sup>39</sup> Second, Seton had his own likeness painted into one of the

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Bath, *Renaissance Decorative Painting in Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2003), 80-86.

<sup>37</sup> ODNB entry on Sir Nicholas Bacon; Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, ed. M.A. Screech (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 1256; Elizabeth McCutcheon, *Sir Nicholas Bacon's Great House Sententiae* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii; Claremont CA: Sir Francis Bacon Foundation, 1977).

<sup>38</sup> Michael Bath provides starting points for further inquiry in *Speaking Pictures. English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London: Longman, 1994), and *Decorative Painting*.

<sup>39</sup> Bath, *Decorative Painting*, 81.

Vaenius panels in Pinkie House, literally putting himself “in the picture” and into Horace’s *Weltanschauung*.<sup>40</sup> Hunter 297’s marginalia similarly inscribe Sinclair into Seneca’s (and Overbury’s) texts in ways that confirm these marginalia as a new text in their own right. Sinclair used the Senecan texts in Hunter 297 as scaffolding, “memory places,” for his own thought, in rather the same way that, as Michael Bath argues, Vaenius’s *Emblemata Horatiana* “is not so much a reading of Horace as expressions of the commonplaces of Stoic philosophy, for which Horace’s writings are simply being used ... as a major source.”<sup>41</sup>

As already instanced by the bee/spider image (extract 4 above), several of Sinclair’s excerpts have contemporary visual representations as their most likely source, and they perform Sinclair’s awareness of reading as a “writerly” activity (not just theoretically, but practically, as he selects and correlates his marginal inscriptions).<sup>42</sup>

7: f.196v, at the end of *Agamemnon*:

γλυκὺς ἀπείρω πόλεμος  
dulce bellum inexpertis

The Greek phrase here (“sweet is war to the untried”), comes from Pindar’s *Fragments*.<sup>43</sup> Sinclair’s confident Greek hand suggests he had some knowledge of the language. The Latin equivalent that follows had

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<sup>40</sup> Bath, *Decorative Painting*, 82.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Bath, “Vaenius Abroad: English and Scottish Reception of the *Emblemata Horatiana*,” in *Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Field of the Emblem*, ed. Bart Westerweel (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 87-106 (90).

<sup>42</sup> Kate McClune argues that Scottish Jacobean writing was emphasised on an interrelation between readers’ (and writers’) metafictional awareness and the making of reason-based judgements: McClune, “The Scottish Sonnet, James VI, and John Stewart of Baldynneis,” in *Langage Cleir Illumynate: Scottish Poetry from Barbour to Drummond, 1375-1630*, ed. Nicola Royan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 165-80.

<sup>43</sup> In modern editions, the Pindar line (from *Fragments* 110) reads “γλυκὺ δ’ ἀπείρω πόλεμος” or “γλυκὺ δὲ πόλεμος ἀπείροισιν”: see e.g. Pindar, *Nemean Odes, Isthmian Odes, Fragments*, ed. William H. Race [Loeb Classical Library 485] (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 342, or *Odes of Pindar, including the principal fragments*, trans. Sir John Sandys (London: Heinemann, 1915), 574-5. I have not yet been able to determine what Renaissance Pindar text Sinclair might have known.

become well known through Erasmus's *Adagia*, particularly after Erasmus added an essay on this topic to the 1515 edition of that text. This essay was in such demand that it was issued separately in 1517 as *Bellum Erasmi*, which "ran like wildfire from reader to reader," and was translated into English in 1533.<sup>44</sup>

8: f.218v, at the end of *Octavia*:

Vsus habet Laudem, Crimen abusus habet  
[diagram] An. Dom. 1582  
22. febr. quar . I .  
hore parte a  
meridie  
Sapiens dominabitur astris

Here we find a tripartite inscription. First, another motto-like heading: "Vsus habet Laudem, Crimen abusus habet" ("The use of it is praiseworthy – only the abuse of it is an object of reproach"). This tag was widely used in protestant discussion of "things indifferent;" it had been applied for instance by the humanist Ralph Thorius to a vexed Jacobean issue, the use of tobacco.<sup>45</sup> But it was also applied to the use of books, as suggested by a contemporary bibliophile's inscription:

Bibliotheca meum regnum, templum atq; lyceum,  
Quin eris antidotum, bibliotheca meum.  
E ductis, ceu fonte, fluit sapientia libris.  
Usus habet laudem, crimen abusus habet.<sup>46</sup>

Sinclair's use in Hunter 297 of the last phrase provides his own perspective on his use of the manuscript, while also defending the inclusion of his second entry on this page, namely a geniture: a diagram mathematically representing the constellation of heavenly bodies at the time of someone's birth, predicting that person's future. By the geniture's side we read: "An.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Erasmus, *Adagiorum Chiliades* (Basel: Froben, 1551), 845; Erasmus *against War*, ed. Lewis Einstein (Boston: Merrymount, 1907), xxiii-xxiv, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Hymnus Tabaci*, (London: Joannis Waterson, 1626), A3v; first printed 1625, but written by 1610. Drummond owned a copy (MacDonald, *Library*, 170).

<sup>46</sup> *Lectionum bibliothecarum memorabilium syntagma, continens dissertationes variorum: de Bibliothecis et libris, literis et literatis*, ed. Rudolfo Capello (Hamburg: Wolf, 1682), 285-89, as recorded in Charles Nodier, *Mélanges tirés d'une petite bibliothèque* (Paris: Crapelet, 1829), 285; English translation of this article in *Philobiblion* 2 (1863): 253-55.



Dom. 1582 | 22. febr. quar . I . | hore parte a | meridie,” referencing a birth date of 22 February 1582.

The third inscription, also to the side of the geniture, puts the other two into perspective: “Sapiens dominabitur astris” (“The wise [man] will rule with respect to the stars”) is a well-known phrase, again also used in emblems, and again one that requires a reader’s writerly input to disentangle its grammatical ambiguity. It has been interpreted as saying that the wise will harness, rather than be led by, the influence of the stars, i.e., wisdom resists any diminution of its own interpretative agency and faculty. Christian interpretations – though absent in Hunter 297 in accordance with contemporary Stoic intentions – have read it as “the wise will be ruled by the heavens.” Thomas Aquinas used the phrase to assert “that the wise man is master of the stars in that he is the master of his own passions,” meeting a very Stoic demand also reflected in Sinclair’s use of Overbury, while in the sixteenth century it was used as a key phrase in debates on free will and Lutheranism.<sup>47</sup> George Wither used it in his *Collection of Emblemes* (London, 1635), adding that astrological influences only affect our physical being whereas divine “Grace ... guides the *Motions of Supposed Fate*. / The *Soule of Man* is nobler then the *Sphaeres*.”<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, the phrase has a Scottish dimension that is directly linked to genitures and Seneca. As Alasdair Stewart has pointed out, *The Complaynt of Scotland* (c.1549) uses it as the “single key phrase to reflect [its] central statement.”<sup>49</sup> I have elsewhere described how *The Complaynt* and its “textual community” bring together Seneca, emblem culture, the subduing of passion in pursuit of tranquillity, and genitures, the latter particularly through the visit of Girolamo Cardano to the Scottish court in 1552. This renowned Italian physician and astrologer was an expert in genitures, using his own to develop a relatively modern kind of psychological self-analysis that emphasized the narration of experience as

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<sup>47</sup> Robert William Dent, *Proverbial Language in English Drama Exclusive of Shakespeare, 1495-1616: An Index* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), 508; Theodore Otto Webel, *The Mediaeval Attitude toward Astrology: particularly in England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1920), 135-41.

<sup>48</sup> George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes*, intro. Michael Bath (Aldershot: Scolar, 1989), 31.

<sup>49</sup> Alasdair M. Stewart, “Sapiens dominabitur astris: Wedderburn, Abell, Luther,” *Aberdeen University Review* 46 (1975-76): 55-62 (p. 57).

a means of imposing reason.<sup>50</sup> The marginal quotations in Hunter 297, and the geniture in particular, suggest that Sinclair used his Seneca manuscript in exactly this way, for self-analysis through reading and narrative – especially if we accept that this geniture references his own birth date: 22 February 1582 would be right for a boy attending grammar school in 1595, whether it reflects the old calendar or the new, used in Scotland after 1600 (in which case the year was 1583).

Finally, “Sapiens dominabitur astris” has often been used as a motto for families, schools and other collective entities.<sup>51</sup> Such mottos distil and then disseminate both identity and aspirations. Sinclair’s inclusion of the Ross family motto, combined with the four Sinclair signatures on the final folio of Hunter 297, presents books and their use within families (including the practice of shared reading, as instanced also in the “et amicorum” book inscriptions) as manifesting a textual community as defined by Brian Stock.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, Sinclair’s use of emblematic sources instances participation in the kind of virtual, imagined community theorised in Benedict Anderson’s more print-based mapping of the way reading practices, in addition to authorial intent, combine to express a cultural identity.<sup>53</sup>

### Hunter 297 as imprint of a textual imagined community

Surveying the evidence above, patterns appear that suggest that William Sinclair of Mey was a conscious participant in, or even creator of, such communities. Thus, his particular intervention in Overbury regarding the relationship between aristocracy and virtue precisely matches what Michael Bath identifies as “the one area where Vaenius consistently departs from received Stoic teaching ... Whereas Stoicism insisted on [virtue’s] availability to men of all ranks, Vaenius repeatedly appears to

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<sup>50</sup> Theo van Heijnsbergen, “Paradigms Lost: Sixteenth-Century Scotland,” in *Schooling and Society*, ed. A.A. MacDonald and M.W. Twomey (Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 199-213 (200-201, 208-9); Anthony Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> E.g., by the Comer and Healy families; Bergvliet High School; and a leading Renaissance Italian theatre group: <http://www.accademiaintonati.it/history.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983).

<sup>53</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

restrict love of virtue to the nobility.”<sup>54</sup> Considering also how Sinclair corrects his own transcription of Overbury when he notes mistakes (e.g. on f.54r, Fig. 1 above), such differences between Sinclair’s and Overbury’s texts instance a deliberate engagement of Sinclair with Vaenius and Stoicism, an insight that guides the interpretations in this paper.

There is one more, virtually conclusive piece in this interpretative jigsaw. As if to match the inscriptions in Hunter 297, William Lithgow’s above-mentioned eulogy of the castle of Mey provides elaborate descriptions of the family crests that adorn the castle, taking care also to cite the motto of the clan chief (Sinclair of Caithness), *Commit thy worke to God*, as well as that of Sinclair of Mey, *Virtute, et Amore*. But the description of the castle that prefaces this is truly illuminating: it is poignantly introduced not as a castle but as a

... Pallace [which] doth containe, two foure-squar’d Courts,  
Graft with braue Works, where th’ Art-drawne pensile sports  
On Hals, high Chambers Galleries, office Bowres,  
Cells, Roomes, and Turrets, Plat-formes, stately Towres:  
Where greene-fac’d gardens, set at *Floraes* feet,  
Make Natures beauty, quicke *Appelles* greet.<sup>55</sup>

While Lithgow’s style is generally hyperbolic, there is nothing similar in tone to the above description in his Scottish travel-writing: the above-quoted presents a startling vision of a northern castle apparently with halls, galleries and “Cells” (i.e. studies, presumably) covered in drawings and paintings, a most likely backdrop for the links to emblematic culture in the inscriptions in Hunter 297. Mey’s garden setting also responds to the Stoic decree to live in agreement with nature and underscores the resemblance between this description of the castle of Mey and Pinkie House.

With this new image of cultural sophistication in mind, patterns of book circulation come into focus. Robert Stewart, bishop of Caithness, previously mentioned as both book collector and Sinclair family patron, had presented copies of Claude Paradin’s *Les devises heroiques* and Andrea Alciato’s *Emblems* to James VI, two key books in emblem history with a proven presence in Scotland in print, on ceilings, and in

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<sup>54</sup> Bath, “Vaenius Abroad,” 93.

<sup>55</sup> Lithgow, as n. 19 above, 501; in the margin of p. 503, opposite the phrase “Virtute, et Amore,” is printed the phrase “Sir Williams Sinclairs motto.”

embroidery.<sup>56</sup> As family friend and the king's great-uncle, Stewart would have been an ideal conduit for books and related lore to travel north, linking together several textual communities.

## Conclusion

Resurrecting the writer of the marginalia as reader in Hunter 297 has brought out writerly patterns that extend the Renaissance Scottish cultural community outward as far as the northern-most tip of mainland Scotland, and beyond. The marginalia point in particular to Stoic ideas and the importance of visual memory. Such a *sententia*-based poetics continues an earlier Scottish one that was greatly influenced by its international contacts. Hunter 297 reveals William Sinclair drawing both on Seneca's philosophy of self-knowledge and what might be termed the gendered Stoicism of Overbury's *A Wife*. In agreement with most sixteenth and early seventeenth century Scottish verse and its Continental influences, but unlike much sixteenth century English courtly lyric and drama, Hunter 297 implicitly rejects the merit of suffering for, or in, love, preferring the Stoic ideal that happiness depends on governing passion by reason. Sinclair's reading of Overbury and the newness of this source (given Sinclair's dating of his inscriptions as 1615) suggests, however, that the emergent imagined community was increasingly British, not (just) Scottish/European, and further research into this cultural-historical period will benefit from bearing in mind both cultural dimensions.

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<sup>56</sup> Henderson, 60; Warner, pp. xl and lxi. Michael Bath, "Alciato and the Earl of Arran," *Emblematika* 13 (2003): 39-52; Michael Bath, "Embroidered Emblems: Mary Stuart's Bed of State," *Emblematika* 15 (2007): 5-32; Bath, *Decorative Painting*, *passim*.